

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

SONY ESPN

Serie A

Fiorentina v Napoli

Live from 2:00am (Friday)

SONY ESPN HD

Serie A

Inter Milan v Lazio

Live from 2:00am (Friday)

SONY SIX

Serie A

Roma v Chivo Verona

Live from 2:00am (Friday)

NATIONAL CRICKET LEAGUE

Four Day Match, Day 3

Dhaka Metro v Dhaka

Time: 9:30am

Venue: Fatullah Stadium

Khulna v Barisal

Time: 9:30am

Venue: BKSP-3

Rajshahi v Sylhet

Time: 9:30am

Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium

Rangpur v Chittagong

Time: 9:30am

Venue: Sylhet Int. Cricket Stadium

DIEGO 'SHOOTS RARE ANTELOPE'

Diego Maradona has angered animal lovers around the world after apparently being photographed holding up an endangered baby antelope. The picture, which has not been verified, showed the Argentina legend smiling next to the carcass of a rare Arabian oryx. Maradona held up the animal in one hand and a rifle in the other, but it is not yet known if he killed it himself. He has so far refrained from commenting on the incident, but social media users have already made their mind up. Twitter users were quick to vent their fury after the photograph surfaced. Maradona is active on social media and last week posted a video of himself running on a treadmill in an attempt to get fit for Christmas.



Ripon of BGB has green jersey

All set for Hatirjheel finale tomorrow

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gopalganj



The Fortune Tour de Bangladesh, the first cycling competition of the country styled after the famous Tour de France, is all set to reach a climax at Hatirjheel in Dhaka tomorrow after the second leg of the race finished in Tungipara, Gopalganj yesterday morning.

Ripon Kumar Biswas of Border Guard Bangladesh grabbed the race lead and the green jersey from the overnight leader Mizanur Rahman of BJMC after accumulating 37 points over the two legs. Sirajul Islam of BGB was in second (30) position to get the yellow jersey while Alamgir Hossain of Bangladesh Army finished the second day in third position (28). Overnight leader Mizanur slipped to fifth position with 21 aggregate points.

A total of 38 cyclists, competing for eight terms, started the race from Gopalgonj at around 8:05am and finished in Tungipara after having raced through 85 kilometres of road in about two hours and forty minutes.

A prize giving ceremony was later arranged in front of the shrine of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibar Rahaman.

Mahabub Ali Khan, general secretary of Gopalgonj Diatrick AL Unit was the chief guest on the occasion where Imtiaj Khan Babul, general secretary of Bangladesh Cycling Federation, was among others present.

The third day of the race will see all the remaining cyclists take a ride of seven laps around the Hatirjheel Lake in Dhaka, after which the winners will be adjudged based on their cumulative scores.



Cyclists ride through the Gopalganj-Tungipara leg of the Fortune Tour de Bangladesh as spectators cheer them on during the second day of the cycling competition yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Fakirerpool on top

SPORTS REPORTER

Fakirerpool Youngmen's Club returned to the top of the Marcel Bangladesh Championship League with a single goal win over Bangladesh Police FC at the Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Jewel struck the all-important goal in the 14th minute to give the Fakirerpool outfit their first win in six matches, having come into this match on back of a 0-1 defeat against Agrani Bank following four straight draws.

Youngmen's Club are now jointly on top alongside Saif SC with 17 points, but the latter have played a match less. Bangladesh Police are in third position with 15 points.

Australian Open prize money raised

AFP, Sydney

Next month's Australian Open will offer Aus\$50 million (US\$36.25 million) in prize money, with the men's and women's singles champions both netting a cool \$3.7 million, organisers said on Wednesday.

The tournament-record purse, up 14 percent on the 2016 edition, also offers players \$50,000 even if they lose in the first round.

"It was especially important for us to increase the compensation for players in the early rounds and qualifying, and this year we have made some real gains," tournament director Craig Tiley said in a statement.

"Our aim is to shift the break-even point for professional players, to ensure that tennis is a viable career option for the best male and female athletes in the world," he added.

Prize money for qualifying matches at the year's first tennis Grand Slam is up 39 percent, and the \$50,000 reward for reaching round one is a rise of 30 percent.

By comparison, last year's US Open offered a total purse of US\$46.3 million, while players won £28.1 million (US\$34.7 million) at Wimbledon and 32 million euros (US\$33.3 million) at the French Open.

Bangladesh eye winning start

SPORTS REPORTER



Hosts Bangladesh will be hoping to make a winning start in the Bangabandhu Asian Senior Men's Central Zone Volleyball Championship when they take on Afghanistan in one of the two matches on the opening day at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur today.

Having set their sights on the title of the zonal championship, Bangladesh are apparently upbeat due to the fact that they have beaten the teams from South Asia -- Maldives, Nepal and Afghanistan -- who are part of this competition. However, one team they have never beaten are Kyrgyzstan, against whom they conceded a 3-0 sets defeat in the World Cup Qualifying round a couple of months ago.

"We have played a lot of international matches to earn some valuable experience. The participating teams are almost equal in terms of strength and I believe we will emerge champions," said captain Saeed Al Jabir at a press conference yesterday.

"The first match against Afghanistan is very important for us. They are good opponents even though we beat them in South Asian Games. If we make a winning start, it will inspire us to do better and there will be no shortage of effort from us," added Jabir.

Bangladesh started their preparation for the championship in early November and the team was later joined by Iranian coach Ali Pour Arosi, who got three weeks' time.

Echoing the same sentiment as his captain, Ali Pour Arosi believes Bangladesh have the ability to win the championship even though he thinks the preparation is not good enough for any international tournament.

"I agree with the captain. They are working hard for this tournament to achieve the best results. The best results mean the first place but you have to remember that each and every team have come here for the title," said Arosi, who had previously worked with the Bangladesh team during the SA Games earlier in the year.

Evaluating his side, Arosi said: "The physical strength of the players is not good enough but they are clever. They need information. They need to know the situation as they are completely different."

The champions, runners-up and third finishers will be awarded US\$ 1500, 1000 and 500 respectively while each member of the Bangladesh team has been already given Tk 50,000 as incentive. Dutch Bangla Bank, Bank Asia, AKS Steel, Fresh Cement, IFIC Bank, Max Group, Alif Group, Croni Group, Islami Bank Ltd, Lotto, WE Mobile, Aamra Network and Pepsi have come forward to help the Bangladesh Volleyball Federation make the championship a success.

Bartomeu sings Messi song

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona star Lionel Messi should win the Ballon d'Or award every year, according to club president Josep Maria Bartomeu, after the Argentine was beaten to the prize by Real Madrid rival Cristiano Ronaldo.

"The Ballon d'Or should be Messi's every year as he is the best player in the history of football," said Bartomeu on Tuesday.

"There are other good players but Messi is undoubtedly number one."

Ronaldo was crowned the world's best footballer for a fourth time earlier this month edging out long-time nemesis Messi.

The decision was heavily questioned by those at the Camp Nou, especially after Messi's sublime display in Sunday's 4-1 defeat of neighbours Espanyol in the Catalan derby.

But Ronaldo was rewarded for helping Real win the Champions League and leading Portugal to Euro 2016 glory.

Vardy receives 3-match ban

AFP, London



Ailing Premier League champions Leicester City suffered a blow on Tuesday as England striker Jamie Vardy received a three-match ban from the Football Association (FA) for his sending off against Stoke City.

The 29-year-old, who had returned to form in dramatic style with a hat-trick against Manchester City 10 days ago to end a three month scoring drought, will miss matches against Everton, West Ham and Middlesbrough.

The FA rejected the club's claim of wrongful dismissal which hinged upon Vardy being off balance as he was harried by Glen Johnson when he challenged Stoke forward Mame Diouf just before the half-hour mark.

Referee Craig Pawson did not hesitate in showing him a red card for the two-footed challenge.

It was the third time in Vardy's career he had been sent for an early shower.

"Jamie Vardy will serve a three-match suspension with immediate effect after his wrongful dismissal claim was rejected,

following an Independent Regulatory Commission hearing," read the FA statement.

"The Leicester City striker was sent off for serious foul play during the game at Stoke City on Saturday 17 December 2016."

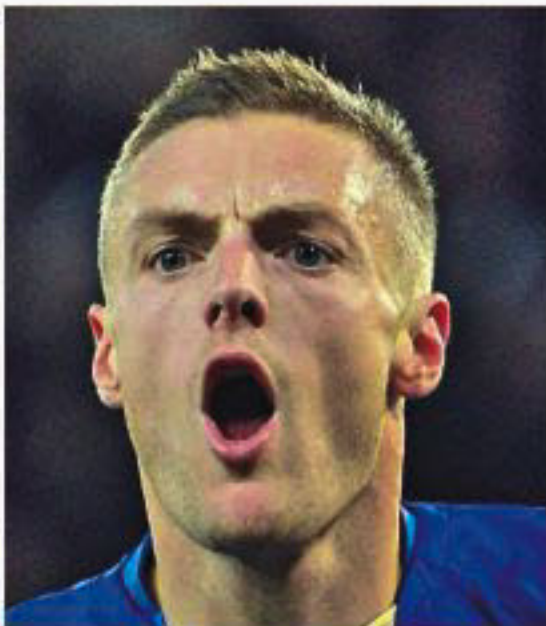
Vardy's suspension means Leicester will be without three key players for the game with Everton next Monday.

Defenders Christian Fuchs and Robert Huth will be absent as they each serve a one-match suspension for picking up their fifth bookings of the campaign in Saturday's ill-tempered Stoke match.

They were two of five Leicester players to be booked by Pawson in the final seven minutes of the first half -- leading to angry scenes at the break with the referee exiting surrounded by security personnel -- in a match which saw them come from 2-0 down to secure a 2-2 draw.

Ironically, Pawson had been criticised for not sending off Manchester United defender Marcos Rojo for a similar two-footed challenge in their Premier League clash with Crystal Palace only a few days prior to the Vardy incident.

Leicester currently sit a lowly 15th in the table, just three points clear of the relegation places.



Milan cry foul over plane delay

AFP, Milan

CEO Adriano Galliani was left fuming after AC Milan were prevented from flying to Qatar on Tuesday for the Italian Super Cup final against champions Juventus.

Milan, who lost the Italian Cup final to Juventus last season, are set to face the double winners in Doha on Friday.

But a technical fault grounded their plane in London, leaving the squad stranded in Milan.

Although Milan aim to fly out on Wednesday, Galliani is already crying foul.

"We've suffered a serious sporting disadvantage," Galliani said in comments widely reported in Italy.

"Juventus are already relaxing in the heat, tomorrow (Wednesday) they'll be training in temperatures 20 degrees higher than at Milanello (Milan's training complex)."

"We'll arrive at night-time and only have one day to prepare."

Some reports in Italy claimed Milan could forego the final if they fail to fly out on Wednesday.



Juventus striker Mario Mandzukic (C) chats with his teammates as they arrive for a training session in Doha yesterday, two days before their Italian Super Cup final against AC Milan.

PHOTO: AFP

Frankfurt go third

AFP, Berlin



Eintracht Frankfurt went third in the Bundesliga with a 3-0 victory over 10-man Mainz on Tuesday, their first win in four on the final round of 2016 matches.

There was a minute's silence, followed by loud applause, before kick-off at each of the four grounds to pay tribute to the victims of Monday's terror attack at Berlin Christmas market.

In Frankfurt, a goal by 18-year-old midfielder Aymen Barkok and two from Sweden striker Branimir Hrgota sealed Eintracht's win.

"I'm happy -- with the result and the way

the season has gone," said Frankfurt coach Niko Kovac.

"Mainz were a constant threat and we have to thank (goalkeeper) Lukas Hradecky. Hrgota gave the hosts an early lead following a dream 50-yard pass from centre-back David Abraham.

Mainz had Jhon Cordoba sent off on 55 minutes for stamping on Abraham's foot after a tackle.

Frankfurt capped the win when Barkok came off the bench to net before Hrgota added the third.

Borussia Dortmund, who were missing suspended Germany winger Marco Reus, climbed one place to fourth following a 1-1 draw with Augsburg.

Kessie comes to Atalanta rescue

AFP, Milan

Ivorian youngster Franck Kessie hit a second-half leveller and set up a dramatic last-gasp winner as Atalanta ended a three-game winless run in a 2-1 win over Empoli on Tuesday.

Atalanta, who last month were being tipped for a place in next season's Europa League, left it late to overcome their Tuscan visitors.

Empoli fired a warning when Levan Mchedlidze got on the end of a free-kick six minutes after the restart to flick the ball past Marco Sportiello at the goalkeeper's far post.

It gave the visitors hope of claiming their first pair of consecutive league wins since December 2015, but Kessie, a towering striker who is already courting interest from a number of top clubs, was a game-changer.

After celebrating his 20th birthday on Monday, he replaced Jasmin Kurtic at half-time and on 74 minutes picked up a loose ball on the edge of the area to beat Lukasz Skorupski with a vicious low drive inside the keeper's near post.

Kvitova out indefinitely

AFP, Prague



Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova will need at least three months of rest after surgery to her left hand cut by a knife-wielding burglar on Tuesday, her spokesman said.

Kvitova suffered an injury on all five fingers and two nerves in her left hand, her racket hand, after fighting with the burglar at her home in the eastern Czech town of Prostějov.

Doctors "stitched the injured finger tendons" during the surgery that took three hours and 45 minutes, Kvitova's spokesman Karel Tejkal told AFP.

"The hand will now be bandaged for two days, then put in a splint for 6-8 weeks.

"She can't burden the tendons for at least three months.

"The injury is serious, but the surgeon says Petra is young and healthy and there is no reason why she can't resume tennis."

Earlier on Tuesday, Tejkal said the burglary was a random crime as "nobody was going to attack or rob her as Petra Kvitova".

The 26-year-old world number 11 said on Facebook she was shaken but "fortunate" to be alive.

"I was attacked in my apartment by an individual with a knife," said Kvitova, adding she tried to defend herself.

"I trust the doctors and I believe it will all end well. Don't worry about me."

Local police spokesman Frantisek Korinek said the attack had occurred before 0730 GMT on Tuesday near the Prostějov town centre and that the burglar was still at large.

Meanwhile, support poured in from fellow tennis stars.

"So upset hearing the news about @Petra_Kvitova. Hands down one of the

niciest people I've ever met. All my thoughts with her," tweeted world number eight Madison Keys.

"Just finding out about @Petra_Kvitova and the awful stabbing and injury to her hand - pulling for you Petra," added Czech-born former great Martina Navratilova.

And Oracene Price, the mother of Serena and Venus Williams, tweeted: "@Petra_Kvitova I'm very sorry to hear what happen to you. I'm praying for your speedy recovery. Blessing to you and your family."

The burglary adds a sombre ending to a rather lacklustre year for Kvitova, who slid from sixth in the world in January to 16th in August.

She sacked two coaches before winning the Wuhan Open in China in October after a 13-month title drought.

She added a victory at Zhuhai, China in November and was on the Czech Republic team that won the Fed Cup later that month, beating France for their fifth title in six years.

On December 1, Kvitova hired a new coach, Czech Jiri Vanek, who had led her Fed Cup teammate Karolina Pliskova to this year's US Open final.

Bronze medallist from the Rio Olympics and Wimbledon champion in 2011 and 2014, Kvitova is also recovering from a stress fracture to her foot.

Just hours before the attack, she said the injury had forced her out of the mixed doubles Hopman Cup starting on January 1, where she was due to play alongside her former boyfriend Adam Pavlasek.

She said she hoped to start next year at Sydney on January 8 to warm up for the Australian Open -- a plan that she will have to drop following doctors' orders.